

Lesson Plan:**Abraham Lincoln's Position on the Question of Slavery and its Extension****Overview:**

Students will examine excerpts from Abraham Lincoln's speeches and letters between 1854 and 1861 for specific information relative to Lincoln's thoughts on the legality and Constitutionality of slavery.

Materials:

Excerpt from 1854 Peoria Speech
Letter to Owen Lovejoy, August 11, 1855
Letter to Joshua Speed, August 24, 1855
Letter to Lyman Trumbull, June 7, 1856
Excerpt from 1858 House Divided Speech
Excerpts from 1860 Address at Cooper Union
(found at: <http://www.hti.umich.edu/l/lincoln>)

Daguerreotype by P. Von Schneidau, Chicago, October 27, 1854
Photograph by Alexander Gardner, Washington, D.C., February 24, 1861
(both found at: Ostendorf, Lloyd. *Lincoln's Photographs: A Complete Album*.
Rockywood Press: Dayton, 1998. pages 18 and 80 respectively.)

Aim/Essential Question

Was Lincoln an abolitionist, a constitutionalist or both?

Background Information:

Although the Constitution never used the word slavery, in three separate sections it made reference to its existence. Subsequently, the Missouri Compromise of 1820 and later the Compromise of 1850 attempted to resolve issues about the expansion of slavery. In 1854, in response to the continued westward expansion of the United States and the related political issue of the institution of slavery, Senator Stephen A. Douglas, the Democratic Senator from Illinois, proposed a new plan. This new plan was the Kansas-Nebraska Bill which allowed for territorial admission to the Union and scrapped the Missouri Compromise Line of 1820. It also instituted a process known as "popular sovereignty." Under this arrangement territories seeking admission to the Union as new states could hold popular public referendums on whether the territory would be deemed a free or a slave state. The passage of the bill on May 30, 1854, reopened the wound of slavery and the precious sectional balance that had permitted the nation to remain part free and part slave.

The Kansas-Nebraska Bill set the stage for Abraham Lincoln's political comeback. In December, 1859, a year after his famous Senate debates with Douglas, Lincoln wrote to Jesse W. Fell, who had solicited biographical information on Lincoln. "I was losing interest in politics when the repeal of the Missouri Compromise aroused me again," wrote Fell.

In October 1854 Lincoln returned to the stump offering a vocal and public reply to Douglas' Kansas- Nebraska Bill, and his opposition to it. Between 1854 and his inauguration to his first term Lincoln continually refined and shaped his argument against the extension of slavery. His views were articulated not only in speeches but in letters to political figures, friends, and others concerned with the issue."

Objectives:

1. Students will explain Lincoln's views on slavery.
1. Students will explain Lincoln's legal and moral arguments against the expansion of slavery into the territories.

Motivation:

Have the students read Article I, Sections 2 and 9. Although slavery is never mentioned, what do these Constitutional statements say about slavery? Given these statements, what options would Lincoln have to express his opposition to slavery?

Procedures:

1. Provide students with a view of the Von Schneidau daguerreotype. Ask the students to describe the image that they see. Have them ascribe some adjectives to the image. Check to see if they recognize the man whose image they are studying.
2. Provide students with a view of the photograph taken by Alexander Gardner. Ask the students to identify the man in the photograph.
3. How do these pictures differ? How can we account for the difference?
4. Break the students into mixed-ability groups
5. Assign a recorder for each group
6. Provide each of the groups with copies of the documents and have each member of the group read the documents.
7. In group discussion the recorder will list the main ideas of either each speech or letter, with a keen eye towards Lincoln's attitude towards slavery.
8. When the groups have completed the reading and recording of the information relative to their document have each group report to the class in the proper chronological sequence. Each group should specifically address Lincoln's attitude about slavery.
9. As a class, chart the attitudes that Lincoln holds regarding slavery. On the board or on an overhead list similar terms that appear in each document and speculate why these terms might reappear. Then ask the students if they note any change in Lincoln's attitude toward slavery after 1854.

10. After all groups have reported, hold a class discussion about Lincoln's view toward slavery.

Summary Questions:

1. Ask students to consider why Lincoln wrote letters to friends or colleagues concerning the issue of slavery.
2. Are there links between the letters that Lincoln wrote and the speeches that he made concerning slavery? Explain.
3. Examine the images of Lincoln. Have students speculate on the differences between the two photographs. What do they tell us about Lincoln?
4. Many of the words Lincoln used in his opposition to the extension of slavery are still admired today. Select one of Lincoln's quotes and explain why it is considered timeless.
5. Would you call Lincoln an abolitionist? Explain.

Application Questions:

1. Have students research President Lincoln's legal and moral arguments against slavery. Ask them to explain why Lincoln chose to emancipate the slaves in 1863, given that he was elected on a platform to only stop the expansion of slavery.
2. Compare his attitudes during his years as President with the attitudes he held during the 1850s.
3. Are there any issues today that carry the same legal and moral arguments as slavery in the 1850's? Are there issues today about which people feel as strongly as they did as on the issue of slavery?

Document A

Speech at Peoria, Illinois, October 16, 1854 – Rebuttal to the Kansas-Nebraska Act

“This *declared* indifference, but as I must think, covert *real* zeal for the spread of slavery, I can not but hate. I hate it because of the monstrous injustice of slavery itself. I hate it because it deprives our republican example of its just influences I the world – enables the enemies of free institutions, with plausibility, to taunt us as hypocrites – causes the real friends of freedom to doubt our sincerity, and especially because it forces so many really good men amongst ourselves into an open war with the very fundamental principles of civil liberty – criticizing the Declaration of Independence, and insisting that there is no right principle of action but *self-interest*.

Before proceeding, let me say I think I have no prejudice against the Southern people. They are just what we would be in their situation. If slavery did not now exist amongst them, they would not introduce it. If it did now exist amongst us, we should not instantly give it up. Doubtless there are individuals, on both sides, who would not hold slaves under any circumstances; and others who would gladly introduce slavery anew, if it were out of existence. We know that some southern men do free their slaves, go north, and become tip-top abolitionists; while some northern ones go south, and become most cruel slave-masters.

The doctrine of self-government is right – absolutely and eternally right – but it has no just application, as here attempted. Or perhaps I should rather say whether it has such just application depends on whether a negro is *not* or *is* a man. If he is *not* a man, why in that case, he who *is* a man may, as a matter of self-government, do just as he pleases with him. But if the negro *is* a man, is it not to that extent, a total destruction of self-government, to say that he too shall not govern *himself*? When the white man governs himself that is self-government; but when he governs himself he also governs *another* man, that is *more* than self-government – that is despotism. If the negro is a *man*, why then my ancient faith teaches me that ‘all men are created equal;’ and that there can be no moral right in connection with one man’s making a slave of another.

Judge Douglas frequently, with bitter irony and sarcasm, paraphrases our argument by saying ‘The white people of Nebraska are good enough to govern themselves, *but they are not good enough to govern a few miserable negroes!!*’

Well I doubt not that the people of Nebraska are, and will continue to be as good as the average of people elsewhere. I do not say the contrary. What I do say is, that no man is good enough to govern another man, *without that other’s consent*. I say this is the leading principle – the sheet anchor of American republicanism. Our Declaration of Independence says:

‘We hold these truths to be self evident; that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That from these rights, governments are instituted among men, DERIVING THEIR JUST POWERS FROM THE CONSENT OF THE GOVERNED.’

Document B

Hon: Owen Lovejoy: Springfield,
My dear Sir: August 11- 1855

Yours of the 7th. was received the day before yesterday. Not even *you* are more anxious to prevent the extension of slavery than I; and yet the political atmosphere is such, just now, that I fear to do any thing, lest I do wrong. Know-nothingism has not yet entirely tumbled to pieces---nay, it is even a little

encouraged by the late elections in Tennessee, Kentucky & Alabama. Until we can get the elements of this organization, there is not sufficient materials to successfully combat the Nebraska democracy with. We can not get them so long as they cling to a hope of success under their own organization; and I fear an open push by us now, may offend them, and tend to prevent our ever getting them. About us here, they are mostly my old political and personal friends; and I have hoped their organization would die out without the painful necessity of my taking an open stand against them. Of their principles I think little better than I do of those of the slavery extensionists. Indeed I do not perceive how any one professing to be sensitive to the wrongs of the negroes, can join in a league to degrade a class of white men.

I have no objection to "fuse" with any body provided I can fuse on ground which I think is right; and I believe the opponents of slavery extension could now do this, if it were not for this K. N. ism. In many speeches last summer I advised those who did me the honor of a hearing to "stand with any body who stands right"--- and I am still quite willing to follow my own advice.

Document C

Dear Speed: Springfield, Aug: 24, 1855

You know what a poor correspondent I am. Ever since I received your very agreeable letter of the 22nd. of May I have been intending to write you in answer to it. You suggest that in political action now, you and I would differ. I suppose we would; not quite as much, however, as you may think. You know I dislike slavery; and you fully admit the abstract wrong of it. So far there is no cause of difference. But you say that sooner than yield your legal right to the slave--- especially at the bidding of those who are not themselves interested, you would see the Union dissolved. I am not aware that *any one* is bidding you to yield that right; very certainly *I* am not. I leave that matter entirely to yourself. I also acknowledge *your* rights and *my* obligations, under the constitution, in regard to your slaves. I confess I hate to see the poor creatures hunted down, and caught, and carried back to their stripes, and unrewarded toils; but I bite my lip and keep quiet. In 1841 you and I had together a tedious low-water trip, on a Steam Boat from Louisville to St. Louis. You may remember, as I well do, that from Louisville to the mouth of the Ohio there were, on board, ten or a dozen slaves, shackled together with irons.^[2] That sight was a continual torment to me; and I see something like it every time I touch the Ohio, or any other slave-border. It is hardly fair for you to assume, that I have no interest in a thing which has, and continually exercises, the power of making me miserable. You ought rather to appreciate how much the great body of the Northern people do crucify their feelings, in order to maintain their loyalty to the constitution and the Union.

I do oppose the extension of slavery, because my judgment and feelings so prompt me; and I am under no obligation to the contrary. If for this you and I

must differ, differ we must. You say if you were President, you would send an army and hang the leaders of the Missouri outrages upon the Kansas elections; still, if Kansas fairly votes herself a slave state, she must be admitted, or the Union must be dissolved. But how if she votes herself a slave state *unfairly*---that is, by the very means for which you say you would hang men? Must she still be admitted, or the Union be dissolved? That will be the phase of the question when it first becomes a practical one. In your assumption that there may be a *fair* decision of the slavery question in Kansas, I plainly see you and I would differ about the Nebraska-law. I look upon that enactment not as a *law*, but as *violence* from the beginning. It was conceived in violence, passed in violence, is maintained in violence, and is being executed in violence. I say it was *conceived* in violence, because the destruction of the Missouri Compromise, under the circumstances, was nothing less than violence. It was *passed* in violence, because it could not have passed at all but for the votes of many members, in violent disregard of the known will of their constituents. It is *maintained* in violence because the elections since, clearly demand it's repeal, and this demand is openly disregarded. *You* say men ought to be hung for the way they are executing that law; and *I* say the way it is being executed is quite as good as any of its antecedents. It is being executed in the precise way which was intended from the first; else why does no Nebraska man express astonishment or condemnation? Poor Reeder is the only public man who has been silly enough to believe that any thing like fairness was ever intended; and he has been bravely undeceived.

That Kansas will form a Slave constitution, and, with it, will ask to be admitted into the Union, I take to be an already settled question; and so settled by the very means you so pointedly condemn. By every principle of law, ever held by any court, North or South, every negro taken to Kansas is free; yet in utter disregard of this---in the spirit of violence merely---that beautiful Legislature gravely passes a law to hang men who shall venture to inform a negro of his legal rights. This is the substance, and real object of the law. If, like Haman, they should hang upon the gallows of their own building, I shall not be among the mourners for their fate.

In my humble sphere, I shall advocate the restoration of the Missouri Compromise, so long as Kansas remains a territory; and when, by all these foul means, it seeks to come into the Union as a Slave-state, I shall oppose it. I am very loth, in any case, to withhold my assent to the enjoyment of property *acquired*, or *located*, in good faith; but I do not admit that *good faith*, in taking a negro to Kansas, to be held in slavery, is a *possibility* with any man. Any man who has sense enough to be the controller of his own property, has too much sense to misunderstand the outrageous character of this whole Nebraska business. But I digress. In my opposition to the admission of Kansas I shall have some company; but we may be beaten. If we are, I shall not, on that account, attempt to dissolve the Union. On the contrary, if we succeed, there will be enough of us to take care of the Union. I think it probable, however, we shall be beaten.

You say if Kansas fairly votes herself a free state, as a christian you will rather rejoice at it. All decent slave-holders *talk* that way; and I do not doubt their candor. But they never *vote* that way. Although in a private letter, or conversation, you will express your preference that Kansas shall be free, you would vote for no man for Congress who would say the same thing publicly. No such man could be elected from any district in any slave-state.

You enquire where I now stand. That is a disputed point. I think I am a whig; but others say there are no whigs, and that I am an abolitionist. When I was at Washington I voted for the Wilmot Proviso as good as forty times, and I never heard of any one attempting to unwhig me for that. I now do no more than oppose the *extension* of slavery.

I am not a Know-Nothing. That is certain. How could I be? How can any one who abhors the oppression of negroes, be in favor of degrading classes of white people? Our progress in degeneracy appears to me to be pretty rapid. As a nation, we began by declaring that "*all men are created equal.*" We now practically read it "*all men are created equal, except negroes.*" When the Know-Nothings get control, it will read "*all men are created equal, except negroes, and foreigners, and catholics.*" When it comes to this I should prefer emigrating to some country where they make no pretence of loving liberty---to Russia, for instance, where despotism can be taken pure, and without the base alloy of hypocrisy.

Mary will probably pass a day or two in Louisville in October. My kindest regards to Mrs. Speed. On the leading subject of this letter, I have more of her sympathy than I have of yours.

And yet let [me] say I am Your friend forever

Document D

Hon: Lyman Trumbull Springfield, June 7, 1856

My dear Sir: The news of Buchanan's nomination came yesterday; and a good many whigs, of conservative feelings, and slight pro-slavery proclivities, withal,

are inclining to go for him, and will do it, unless the Anti-Nebraska nomination shall be such as to divert them. The man to effect that object is Judge McLean; and his nomination would save every whig, except such as have already gone over hook and line, as Singleton, Morrison, Constable, & others. J. T. Stuart, Anthony Thornton, James M. Davis (the old settler) and others like them, will heartily go for McLean, but will every one go for Buchanan, as against Chase, Banks, Seward, Blair or Fremont. I think they would stand Blair or Fremont for Vice-President---but not more.

Now there is a grave question to be considered. Nine tenths of the Anti-Nebraska votes have to come from old whigs. In setting stakes, is it safe to totally disregard them? Can we possibly win, if we do so? So far they have been disregarded. I need not point out the instances.

I think I may trust you to believe I do not say this on my own personal account. I am *in*, and shall go for any one nominated unless he be "*platformed*" expressly, or impliedly, on some ground which I may think wrong.

Since the nomination of Bissell we are in good trim in Illinois, save at the point I have indicated. If we can save petty nearly all the whigs, we shall elect him, I think, by a very large majority.

I address this to you, because your influence in the Anti-Nebraska nomination will be greater than that of any other Illinoisian.

Let this be confidential. Yours very truly A. LINCOLN

Document E

"If we could first know *where* we are, and *whither* we are tending, we could then better judge *what* to do, and *how* to do it.

We are now far into the *fifth* year, since a policy was initiated, with the *avowed* object, and *confident* promise, of putting an end to slavery agitation.

Under the operation of that policy, that agitation has not only, *not ceased*, but has *constantly augmented*.

In *my* opinion, it *will* not cease, until a *crisis* shall have been reached, and passed.

'A house divided against itself cannot stand.'

I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half *slave* and half *free*.

I do not expect the Union to be *dissolved* – I do not expect the house to *fall* – but I *do* expect it will cease to be divided.

It will become *all* one thing, or *all* the other.

Either the *opponents* of slavery, will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in course of ultimate extinction; or its *advocates* will push it forward, till it shall become alike lawful in *all* the States, *old* as well as *new* – *North* as well as *South*.

Let any one who doubts, carefully contemplate that now almost complete legal combination – piece of *machinery* so to speak – compounded of the Nebraska doctrine, and the Dred Scott decision. Let him consider not only *what work* the machinery is adapted to do; and *how well* adapted; but also, let him study the *history* of its construction, and trace, if he can, to trace the evidences of design, and concert of action, among its chief bosses, from the beginning.

But, so far, *Congress* only, had acted; and an *indorsement* by the people, *real* or apparent, was indispensable, to *save* the point already gained, and give chance for more.

The new year of 1854 found slavery excluded from more than half the States by State Constitutions, and from most of the national territory by Congressional prohibition.

Four days later, commenced the struggle, which ended in repealing that Congressional prohibition.

This opened all the national territory to slavery; and was the first point gained.”

Document F

Let all who believe that ‘our fathers, who framed the Government under which we live, understood this question just as well, and even better, than we do now, ‘speak as they spoke, and act as they acted upon it. This is all Republicans ask – all Republicans desire – in relation to slavery. As those fathers marked it, so let it be again, marked, as an evil not to be extended, but to be tolerated and protected only because of and so far as is actual presence among us makes that toleration and protection a necessity. Let all the guaranties those fathers gave it, be, not grudgingly, but fully and fairly maintained.

When you make these declarations, you have a specific and well-understood allusion to an assumed Constitutional right of yours, to take slaves into the federal territories, and to hold them as there as property. But no such right is specifically written in the Constitution. That instruments is literally silent about any such right. We, on the contrary, deny that such a right has any existence in the Constitution, even by implication

Your purpose, then plainly stated, is, that you will destroy the Government, unless you be allowed to construe and enforce the Constitution as you please, on all points in dispute between you and us. You will rule or ruin in all events.

Under all these circumstances, do you really feel yourselves justified to break up this Government, unless such a court decision as yours is, shall be at once submitted to as a conclusive and final rule of political action? But you will no abide the election of a Republican President! In that supposed event, you say, you will destroy the Union; and then, you say, the great crime of having destroyed it will be upon us! That is cool. A highwayman holds a pistol to my ear, and mutters through his teeth, ‘Stand and deliver, or I shall kill you, and then you will be a murderer!’

Wrong as we think slavery is, we can yet afford to let it alone where it is, because that much is due to the necessity arising from its actual presence in the nation; but can we, while our votes will prevent it, allow it to spread into the National Territories, and to overrun us here in these Free States? If our sense of duty forbids this, then let us stand by our duty, fearlessly and effectively. Let us be diverted by none of those sophistical contrivances wherewith we are so industriously plied and belabored – contrivances such as groping for some middle ground between the right and the wrong, vain as the search for a man who should neither be a living man nor a dead man – such as a policy of ‘don’t care’ on a question about which all true men do care – such as Union appeals beseeching true Union men to yield to Disunionists, reversing the divine rule, and calling, not the sinners, but the righteous and repentance – such as invocations to Washington, imploring men to unsay what Washington said, and undo what Washington did.

Neither let us be slandered from our duty by false accusations against us, nor frightened from it by menaces of destruction to the Government nor of dungeons to ourselves. LET US HAVE FAITH THAT RIGHT MAKES MIGHT, AND IN THAT FAITH, LET US, TO THE END, DARE TO DO OUR DUTY AS WE UNDERSTAND IT.”